

WissensKünste II – “Pictures beyond the picture”

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For some time now, the picture - as hardly any other subject - , its theory and history have stood in the centre of the interdisciplinary interest in cultural studies. This has led to the attempt to establish non-subject specific picture studies (under the participation of the art historians Horst Bredekamp, Hans Belting and Gottfried Boehm, but also of philosophers like Günter Abel): „An extensive study of the picture has started.“ (Boehm). At least since the *iconic* or *pictorial turn* the picture has roused attention anew. In this process the analysis of the various conditions and structures of the meaning of the picture in media and cultural studies has led to a dismantling of a naive understanding of what a picture is and what its effects are. As pictures have accompanied nearly the whole (historical) process of the European civilization, they are more and more acknowledged as sources and testimonies of historical perspectives and analyses (Frances Haskell). Only recently this increasing acknowledgment has become effective for the history of knowledge and of the sciences in analyses of the knowledge represented in pictures as well as in analyses of the pictorial representation of knowledge (for example: Galison, Stafford, Lenoir, Breidbach). Here, the interest reaches beyond the aesthetic and iconographic dimensions of the pictures and concentrates on the meaning and function of pictures in the sciences, on the referential and visualizing functions of the picture and on the picture as an epistemological model and media.

In the course of this development it became evident that not only various disciplines meet in their interest in the picture but that they also have differing ways of dealing with pictures, diverse subject specific concepts and methods of studying the picture as well as a differing way of placing the pictures in different discourse and contexts. Due to the differing epistemological and methodological premises for the questions of the concepts and effects of pictures in aesthetic, social and academic contexts, diverse hypotheses, interpretations and suggestions (as results of symposia, anthologies etc.) have been developed where the concept of the picture – similar to the one of culture – is on the verge of losing any profile. In addition to that, extensive studies were undertaken which

tried to cover the origin and the whole history of the pictures. In this situation it will be important to make progress in the interdisciplinary accesses to the pictures in a precise focussing of the questions.

This new interest in the picture is outlined by a seemingly paradoxical constellation. Whereas studies in culture and the history of science speak of a *pictorial turn*, the discourses in the arts speak of *leaving the picture*.¹ However, both perspectives meet in a vanishing point: the pictures beyond the picture. For, on the one hand the *pictorial turn* is media historically connected with the domination by digital and technological pictures and the new visualizing procedures in the sciences, so that this *turn* generates different ways of representation than the conventional iconic and indexical pictures; procedures which remind us of older figures and schemata before the separation of text and picture and of traditions of writing picturality and picture writings.² On the other hand the frequently quoted ‚leaving of the picture‘ in media art leads to a *pictorial space* where questions of designing pictures within the real three-dimensional space can be taken up more adequately. Pictures are not only understood as two-dimensional works of art any more but undergo a process which leads them into three-dimensional space; the meaning of this process is as yet hardly examined by aesthetic theories. For, the concepts of picturality within the discussions of aesthetic theories are still derived mainly from the concepts of traditional picture media which describe them as being related to reality by a relationship in which they have the status of a representation.

As, generally speaking, the phenomenality of pictures has changed in modern art – for example, abstract painting, ready mades, objects, performances, assemblages, mixed media and environments -, the traditional concepts of the picture are not adequate any longer, especially for describing media pictures; moreover, they consistently undermine every media aesthetically differentiated understanding of the picture which ascribes pictures a participation in media characterizations. An approach to the history and

¹ See for, example, the publication „Ausstieg aus dem Bild“, ed. by the Hamburger Kunsthalle. Im Blickfeld 2 Hamburg, 1996.

² This is demonstrated with a lot of material in a book where scholars of different disciplines examine the ways of representation of their discipline with regard to the question if these are „still“ pictures. Bettina Heintz/Jörg Huber (eds.): Mit dem Auge denken. Strategien der Sichtbarmachung in wissenschaftlichen und virtuellen Welten. Zürich 2001.

characteristic features of pictures can only be achieved by a parallel approach to the media. The media are not only technologies for conveying pictures but also technologies of perception. Therefore, pictures must be perceived „im Modus (ihres) Erscheinens“ („in the mode of their apparition“).³ They demand a form of autonomy within media processes which leaves the traditional representational relationship behind in favour of a dynamization of this structure. Evidently, the concept of the picture with regard to multimedia installations used in the arts as well as in the sciences is hardly analyzed in the current debates yet, although the concept of the picture could be stated more precisely regarding the question of representation especially in the artistic media. Therefore, the outlined context must serve as a background for the questions of media specific conditions which first of all generate a picture, i.e. the questions of the preconditions of certain constructions of visibility.

As one can generally state that a picture in the sense of its representational character should be at the same time similar and dissimilar to what it represents, i.e. that it should by no means simply copy every element of the represented, the *difference* is thus constitutive. In this sense, pictures do not only refer to something but they first of all show themselves. The new media have led to a fundamental change of the meaning of the pictures in the sense that the effects of a picture have to be examined in an inseparable relation to the „Wesen des Sehens“ („the nature of seeing“).⁴

Also, the question of visualizing techniques in the sciences gains a new relevance by the development of recent media and information systems and by an increasing „pictorialization“ of the sciences. Hypertexts, virtual reality and mind maps explicitly show the limits of the habitual academic narrative sequentialization. One must examine new ways of perception, representation and knowledge which are generated by these new techniques. One must look at the cultural and subcultural differences of perception of text and picture as well as of the strategies of abstractions and representations.

³ Martin Seel: Vor dem Schein kommt das Erscheinen. Bemerkungen zu einer Ästhetik der Medien. In: Merkur, Heft 9/10, Sept./Okt. 1993, p. 771.

⁴ Jonathan Crary: Techniken des Betrachters. Sehen und Moderne im 19. Jahrhundert. Basel 1996, p. 11.

The question of the meaning of pictures can only be put in concrete terms when the question of each *specific* picture is formulated, i. e. the picture must be seen in relation to its functions with regard to visibility, discourse, knowledge, memory, institution and apparatus; also, the preconditions which generate a picture in the first place must be examined, that is the preconditions for generativity, visibility and figurality of representations. In this sense the genuine and productive effects of the picture itself are placed in the focus of the discussion.

The question of new pictures should not be followed up here in an academic symposium but in form of a dialogue between scholars/theoreticians and artists. In this dialogue the artists and their works should not be subject of analysis or interpretation of scholars but the specific ways of perception and knowledge of artistic works are equally involved in the discussion of the picture. That is, we will explicitly have artistic ways of research. This form of dialogue was already proved to be good by the Zentrum für Literaturforschung in a different subject matter, the relation of „LifeSciences – art – media“, in a series of events in 2001/2002

By this form aspects of questions could arise by the intersections, reflections and condensations, but also by the inequalities, contrasts and sometimes blind spots or gaps between the two contributions which are not focussed in an academic discourse or discussion. As the outlined changes of the pictures are taking place at the intersection of the humanities and the sciences as well as of the arts and the sciences, we will have three positions at every event and for each thematic aspect: humanities, sciences and art.

The perspective of the series of events is on the one hand focussed on the epistemological role pictures play in perception which is determined by technological media. This is one of those questions which is also relevant in various research projects at the Zentrum für Literaturforschung which work on the „two cultures“ and deal with exemplary constellations and figures at the intersections of sciences and humanities. For such science historical perspectives the analysis of pictures of knowledge and of knowledge of pictures is an important precondition.

In this sense, the genuine and productive effects of the picture itself are placed in the centre of interest in the series of events „Pictures beyond the picture“.

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The above outlined questions will be structured in four thematic aspects:

The leaving of the picture

Pictures of knowledge

Art and Science

.The living picture